

## Community Connections General Application Form

*(Please complete this portion of application only once per organization if submitting for multiple sites)*

### General Application Form

**Applicant Organization Name:** Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc.

**Alias/DBA:** TRLA

### Program Name for Google Fiber Connection:

Enhancing Access to Justice through Technology

### Organization Mission and Purpose:

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid's mission is to promote the dignity, self-sufficiency, stability, and safety of low-income Texans by providing free, high-quality civil legal services and related legal education to low-income and disadvantaged residents living in the 68 counties of central, south, and west Texas.

### Organization Website:

[www.trla.org](http://www.trla.org)

### Contact Name:

Geoff Rips

**City:** Austin

**State:** Texas

**Zip:** 78751

**Phone:** 512-374-2792

**Email:** grips@trla.org

### Location(s) applying for site selection (including physical address of location) and how long your organization plans on being at each location:

4920 N. IH-35 Austin, TX 78751. TRLA owns this building and so plans to be here in perpetuity.

### Type of Organization:

☒ Non-Profit

☐ Public Entity

### Number of years in operation:

43

### Number of employees at location:

57

## Community Connections Criteria Form

*(Please complete this portion of application once for organization in an electronic document and please explain each response, 1000 words maximum per response, please)*

### Criteria Form

#### Organization

1. What is your agency's vision? *(response required for all agencies)*

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid's vision is for all Texans, regardless of economic disadvantage, to have equal access to civil legal services which improve their quality of life.

2. What is your agency's mission and purpose? *(response required for all agencies)*

It is the mission of Texas RioGrande Legal Aid to promote the dignity, self-sufficiency, safety, and stability of low-income Texans by providing free, high-quality civil legal aid and related legal education. TRLA seeks to provide low-income and disadvantaged residents with access to justice.

3. Please list your organization's affiliations, community partnerships, certifications, and/or accreditations. *(response required for all agencies)*

TRLA employs 55 certified paralegals, five certified social workers, and 125 full-time attorneys who are licensed to practice law in the State of Texas.

TRLA plays an active role in the communities we serve, continually seeking new partnerships and collaborations that address client needs creatively and efficiently. We are the sole LSC legal services provider for Central, South and West Texas. TRLA continues to establish special programs and/or programs that address the specific legal needs of our clients.

TRLA's Legal Alliance for Survivors of Abuse (LASA) Project has established Memoranda of Understanding with 28 domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers across our service region, including SafePlace and SAHELI in Austin. TRLA attorneys actively work with shelter advocates to meet the legal needs of clients. These include obtaining protective orders, divorces, child custody and the creation of safety plans for the residents.

TRLA partners with Volunteer Legal Services (VLS) in Austin, El Paso, and San Antonio to serve walk-in clients at twice-weekly legal clinics. In Austin, these legal clinics are held from 6:00 – 8:00 pm on Mondays at Martin Middle School (East Austin) and on Wednesdays at Webb Middle School (North Central Austin). TRLA additionally provides legal services to low-income veterans at a Veteran's Clinic once a month in the Montopolis area. These clinics allow residents to obtain free legal advice from a lawyer and/or apply for on-going legal services. TRLA additionally utilizes community volunteers to provide pro-bono legal representation to clients through Community Justice Programs (CJP), located in Hays County, El Paso, the Upper and Lower Rio Grande Valleys, Kerr County, Bexar County, and Laredo.

TRLA's Foster Youth Justice Project (FYJP) is the only legal services program in Texas; it serves current and aged-out foster youth statewide. FYJP is well-known across the state and has regular referral relationships established with state and local affiliates of Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA),

Austin Community College, Angel Reach, Preparation for Adult Living (PAL), the Houston Alumni & Youth Center (HAY Center), the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), Baptist Children and Family Services, Lifeworks, local Attorney ad Litem, Casey Family Programs, the PRIDE Center in El Paso, and local colleges and universities. TRLA FYJP staff members additionally participate in coalitions and collaborations around foster youth issues, including Ready by 21, the Children's Commission, Central Texas Workgroup, and the Texas Homeless Education Office. The FYJP has additionally trained attorneys and student attorneys through the Austin Young Lawyers Association and the South Texas College of Law.

TRLA's Education Law team works closely with Disability Rights Texas, , law enforcement, and various community organizations to educate parents, private attorneys, law enforcement, the courts, and schools about student rights. The Special Education team has regular referral relationships with the ARC of Texas, the Brighton Center, and juvenile probation departments.

TRLA utilizes support from local universities and graduate programs to supplement the work of paid staff to cost-effectively provide services to clients. During the summer of 2013, TRLA hosted 27 summer law clerks to work directly with attorneys and paralegals in 8 offices. In Austin specifically, TRLA partners with the UT School of Social Work for graduate-level social work interns and the UT School of Law. Second and third year law students staff TRLA's intake hotline, the Texas Access to Justice (TAJ) hotline, five days a week.

TRLA consistently receives referrals from the Texas Legal Services Center and Texas Civil Rights Project. TRLA attorneys additionally collaborate and/or consult with the Texas Access to Justice Fund (TAJF) and local Austin organizations, including Catholic Charities, Texas Appleseed, the Austin Tenant's Council, Austin Resource Center for the Homeless, Austin-Travis County Integral Care, Travis County Housing Authority, Lifeworks, Goodwill, Caritas, Court Appointed Special Advocates, ADAPT, Veteran's Services, Consumer Credit Counseling, Austin Interfaith, Austin Children's Shelter, and Salvation Army. TRLA is a partner in the Travis County Re-entry Roundtable and works with numerous neighborhood associations in Austin, Corpus Christi, El Paso, and San Antonio to provide legal advice on issues such as housing and environmental justice.

4. What is the total number of unduplicated clients served by your organization at this location last fiscal year? *(response required for non-profit agencies only)*

Last year, TRLA served 25,939 unduplicated clients in central, south and west Texas. Approximately 7,000 of those clients came from Austin and surrounding communities. Attorneys in the Austin office also work with clients from across our service area on cases in their practice area.

5. Briefly provide an overview of your organization and the services it offers. *(response required for all agencies)*

Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, established in 1970, is a nonprofit organization providing free civil legal aid to low-income residents of 68 counties throughout south, west, and central Texas. It includes the former Central Texas Legal Services. TRLA is committed to expanding access to justice for low-income individuals and families throughout Texas, and has offices located in Alpine, Austin, Beeville, Brownsville, Corpus Christi, Del Rio, Eagle Pass, Edinburg, El Paso, Harlingen, Laredo, San Antonio, Sinton, Victoria, and Weslaco. TRLA is currently the largest provider of free, civil legal services in Texas and the third largest in the United States.

The TRLA Austin office is home to 57 staff members, including attorneys practicing in most TRLA practice areas, a social worker, paralegals, legal secretaries, development and communications staff, and law clerks from UT, who work on the TAJ (Texas Access to Justice) hotline, receiving intake from low-

income residents seeking legal assistance. Most of the TRLA staff is bilingual.

TRLA's services are organized around six broad practice areas, including Labor & Employment, Public Benefits, Housing, Family, Economic & Social Justice, and Individual Rights. In order to address the range of legal issues facing the low-income community, TRLA has 39 practice areas within these six groups, including Disability Rights, Disaster Assistance, Domestic Violence, Foreclosure Law, Mental Health Law, Homelessness, and Veteran's Benefits, among others.

6. Describe the community issues your organization is attempting to address. Include a description of the population most at risk of experiencing the issues described. *(response required for non-profit agencies only)*

Through free civil legal representation and related legal education, TRLA seeks to improve the safety, self-sufficiency, and quality of life for low-income individuals and families. Our attorneys represent low-income residents on such issues as domestic violence, substandard housing, evictions and foreclosures, employment practices, access to public and medical benefits, disability rights, access to public transportation, legal rights of ex-offenders, the rights of aged-out foster youth, child custody, elder law issues, identity theft, and veteran's issues. TRLA recognizes the barrier to justice experienced by members of the low-income community, as hiring a private attorney is a costly—and often impossible—expense. Virtually the only eligibility criterion that must be established is income; 100% of our clients live at or below 125% of the federal poverty line. For a family of four, this amounts to less than \$27,938 per year.

7. Describe the demographics (e.g. ethnicity, gender, age, and income levels) and geographic characteristics of the community members your organization serves. *(response required for non-profit agencies only)*

While all of TRLA's clients must be considered low-income based on federally established poverty guidelines, TRLA serves clients of all ages, genders, races, and ethnicities. A majority of TRLA's clients are Hispanic. Clients include the homeless, veterans, survivors of domestic abuse or sexual assault, the elderly, the disabled, victims of crime, and countless others—individuals who are unable to afford legal assistance, even in desperate circumstances.

8. Describe your organization's accessibility (e.g. accessible main entrance, within blocks of a public bus stop, etc.). *(response required for non-profit agencies only)*

TRLA's fifteen offices located throughout urban and rural areas of south, west, and central Texas—as well as staff placed in host sites—attempt to make services as accessible to clients as possible. All offices comply with ADA regulations, as a large number of our clients are physically disabled. The Austin location is located directly off a main highway and is half a block from a city bus stop. Services are further made accessible to clients through various points of contact, including the twice-weekly legal clinics and TRLA's intake hotline, the Texas Access to Justice (TAJ) hotline, which is staffed Monday through Thursday 8:00 am – 8:00 pm and on Friday from 8:00 am – 6:00 pm. A majority of TRLA's attorneys, paralegals, and support staff members are bilingual in English and Spanish. We also contract with specialist for assistance in serving deaf clients and clients speaking languages other than English and Spanish.

9. If selected, how will your organization incorporate Google Fiber into the services it offers? *(response required for all agencies)*

TRLA serves upwards of 25,000 low-income clients in central, south and west Texas each year. All client intake, case documentation, and correspondence are conducted through a single set of servers currently located in the TRLA San Antonio office. This means that all TRLA attorneys, paralegals, secretaries,

volunteer lawyers, and advocates from our 28 partner domestic violence shelters are using the internet simultaneously almost every business hour of every day. With such a high volume of users, the server bank often becomes overloaded—slowing the ability of our attorneys to do their work, thereby creating roadblocks for the effective and efficient handling of our clients' legal issues.

While TRLA has made efforts to increase our bandwidth, our current technology is still limited. If selected as a Community Connection, **TRLA plans to move its server farm to Austin, using Google Fiber as a mechanism for building the capacity of our work at a faster pace and with less interruption. We would, consequently, be able to serve more clients more effectively and efficiently in Central Texas and across our service region.**

TRLA's server farm consists of more than 30 data and VOIP servers. These servers provide database, email, website, remote desktop/Citrix, Internet access to the entire organization. There are also 28 domestic violence shelters and six independent non-profit partner organizations that connect to our server farm and use our Client Tracking System. During business hours, TRLA's server farm supports approximately 250 remote desktop/connections, more than 400 plus email sessions from desktops, laptops, tablets, and smartphones and all the incoming web traffic to our intranet and website. With only 20 Mb AT&T Internet connection to handle all our web traffic, however, users frequently experience sluggish response times, connection timeouts, and server connectivity issues.

A Google Fiber internet connection will not only resolve these connectivity issues, but it will also enable TRLA to improve IT support to our staff and to our partner organizations. This would result in improved communication between our legal staff and their clients, thus providing a direct benefit to our community.

With Google Fiber we also envision the following IT upgrades and services:

- Improved archiving, faster searches, and more efficient access to our existing archive of 12 million-plus emails, 800 thousand-plus PDF (scanned) documents, and 3 million-plus documents;
- Video conference sessions between attorneys, staff, and clients at remote locations, such as domestic violence shelters;
- Improved cloud-based document sharing;
- Faster offsite data backups;
- The ability to provide intake services along with remote client representation (video conference) at remote (rural) locations;
- The ability to host additional partner organizations;
- The ability to move to a Gmail-based email system.

Google Fiber would also allow us to create a community room in our building for community members to use computers to fill out interactive forms that would provide them with self-help capacities as well as provide intake forms for TRLA for potential clients.

TRLA currently connects its 15 branch offices through a Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP), which would ideally be moved to Austin as part of this modernization. TRLA has long sought to enhance this system by adding video capability, which would be more feasible with Google's enhanced transmission lines and unlimited capacity.

TRLA seeks to add video-conferencing capabilities to improve communication with our partner domestic violence shelters and the courthouses within our Public Defender Programs. Many of these

partners are located in rural counties, requiring attorneys to sometimes travel hundreds of miles from main branch offices to conduct client interviews. Video conferencing would allow TRLA staff to interview clients remotely, while still building trust and rapport. Decrease in travel-related expenses as well as actual time spent traveling will allow TRLA to serve more clients more efficiently.

10. The City of Austin requires an annual report explaining how selected organizations and the community they serve benefit from Google Fiber. If selected, how will your organization measure the impact Google Fiber has on those served by your organization? Describe evaluation methods, goals, and objectives.  
(response required for all agencies)

TRLA maintains a sophisticated internal database, the Client Tracking System (CTS), which depends upon a less-than-efficient internet delivery system. The CTS tracks the number of clients served on an annual basis, and can be sorted based on office location and other demographic data sets. This data can be compared year to year. While we currently set goals and objectives for client service, we would also set goals and objectives for the number of times our server system is down or slow. We would also conduct an annual survey of attorneys and paralegals to determine their experience with the new Google Fiber delivery. These surveys will be both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

**Please include location if applying for more than one location (include priority rank if submitting for more than one location:**

TRLA is applying for a Community Connection through Google Fiber at only the Austin location (4920 North IH-35). TRLA owns the building in which our offices are located, so we will be here in perpetuity. TRLA's TAJ hotline is located in the same building. If selected, TRLA will relocate the entire organization's servers, which are currently located in San Antonio, to our Austin office. All fifteen of TRLA's offices and the 25,000 clients we serve annually will benefit from the Google Fiber connection at this one location. In addition, our location on IH-35 adjoins the location of two other non-profits, Manos de Cristo and the new People's Community Clinic dental clinic.

**Community**

*(responses required for all agencies)*

1. Briefly describe how Google Fiber will enhance public participation in your organization's service.

Google Fiber will enable TRLA attorneys, paralegals, social workers, and support staff to serve the low-income community of Austin and the rest of our service region more effectively and efficiently.

2. Briefly describe how your organization promotes digital inclusion.

TRLA promotes access to justice through the civil legal system. Google Fiber, by providing far greater capacity for our attorneys and paralegals, will help promote greater access to the legal system through enhanced digital capacity.

Google Fiber would also help us create a community room with computers for Austin residents to use in order to fill out interactive forms for self-help in legal matters.

3. Will bringing Google Fiber to your organization help the underserved? Please explain.

Google Fiber will provide the capacity for our attorneys and paralegals, serving more than 25,000 clients per year, to work in a timely manner. Currently, attorneys often find themselves waiting for the system to allow them to do their work, be that legal research, filing legal documents, or preparing cases in a timely

manner. Not only is that frustrating, but it slows the wheels of justice, sometimes delays hearings, and means fewer clients can be served.

4. How much of your community will benefit from the Google Fiber connection?

TRLA serves more than 25,000 clients per year. That includes about 7,000 clients in Central Texas around Austin. In addition, TRLA attorneys conduct community education about civil legal rights to community groups throughout our service area.

5. Briefly describe how your organization will offer a new community service as a result of the Google Fiber connection.

While the Google Fiber connection will not create a new community service, it will greatly enhance TRLA's ability to serve our communities. TRLA attorneys and paralegals will be able to work more effectively and efficiently on behalf of our clients.

### **Innovation**

*(responses required for all agencies)*

1. Please describe the potential innovative applications that could be developed with a gigabit connection.

In addition to supporting our servers—and thereby our attorneys and clients—Google Fiber would allow TRLA the opportunity to: interact through Skype with rural shelter partners and rural clients; train multiple attorneys across offices with enhanced video and interactive features; take advantage of possible implementation of remote court appearances (for example, some cases require Austin-based attorneys travel to Eagle Pass, Sonora, and Raymondville for court proceedings); speed electronic court filings, a much improved website; create a more efficient and effective intake process, all of which is conducted through our online database; provide better support and training for pro bono attorneys, including resources, training videos, etc.; set up a Continuing Legal Education (CLE) library that could be accessed by other Legal Service organizations, TRLA staff, and private attorneys; and create a computer set-up in our building for potential clients to use to fill out self-help legal and intake forms and to gain access to information on their rights.

2. Does your organization have or foresee high bandwidth applications?

Given that TRLA is spread across a substantial service region of south, west, and central Texas, we envision utilizing this improved bandwidth to video-conference with attorneys across our 15 offices. TRLA would also like to implement video conferencing with our advocates and clients housed in our 28 partnering domestic violence shelters and rape crisis centers, many of which are rurally located.

3. Briefly describe how your organization is interested in advancing your technology.

TRLA is very interested in creating a level playing field for the representation of low-income Texans. We do not think that representing low-income clients should require shoestring technology, but should instead be able to employ the same technological support and applications commonly used by private law

firms, some of whom oppose us in court.

4. Does your organization have the capacity and resources to advance your technologies? Please explain.

TRLA is supported by a professional IT department that is itching to expand our technological capacities with the opportunities offered by Google Fiber. We also have a budget, based on other grant sources, to rotate in new computers and other technology for our attorneys and other staff members.

**Practical Pragmatic**  
*(responses required for all agencies)*

1. Will the connection help your organization financially? How?

Yes. TRLA has seen large cuts in the past few years in the federal budget for legal assistance. In 2013 alone, TRLA experienced a \$3.2 million reduction in federal support, necessitating layoffs of attorneys, paralegals and secretaries in Austin and our other offices. This, of course, also has a direct impact on the number of clients we can serve.

Google Fiber would save TRLA at minimum the \$4298/month we currently pay for the 20MB internet service in San Antonio. (That means at least \$51.5K per year and \$516 K per the ten years at current rates.) There is also a potential monthly savings once our AT&T MPLS contracts expire because having the server farm in Austin would provide additional MPLS circuit providers that can compete with AT&T MPLS pricing

2. Will this be the organization's primary or secondary connection?

Primary.

3. Does your organization have (or will it have) equipment necessary to connect?

Yes.

4. Does your organization currently have access to a high bandwidth connection?

Yes, but the Time Warner cable currently used is not as reliable as a Google Fiber connection would be. It would also not be able to support moving our server farm from San Antonio to Austin.



**Applicant's Statement**

I certify that answers given herein are true and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that false or misleading information given in my application will result in disqualification. I understand and agree that I am required to abide by City of Austin ordinances, policies and rules.

I understand if selected to receive a Google Fiber connection that the organization I represent may be required to:

☐ submit an annual report to the TARA Office explaining how the organization has benefited from the free service.



Signature

September 27, 2013

Date

Executive Director

Title

**Please submit this form to TARA by 4:45 p.m. on Monday, September 30, 2013.**

Email: [digital.inclusion@austintexas.gov](mailto:digital.inclusion@austintexas.gov)

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Austin, Texas 78701